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A paper presented to a workshop for personnel from the 16 Project ABLE cities enlarges upon the theme that to create genuine equality of educational opportunity, educational offerings have to be unequal. Attempts to carry out equal opportunity in education include the efforts of the New York City Commission on Integration whose success at a city junior high school led to the Higher Horizons preventive program in New York City schools.

Consultation and technical assistance about what is being learned in New York City is offered to other communities through Community Talent Search (CTS), sponsored by the National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students (NSSFNS). Results have been many, with projects spreading to other states and communities. Published articles in popular magazines have described the beneficial programs. Perhaps 250,000 deprived children are now benefiting from special services. There are eight to ten million disadvantaged children, illustrating the necessary scope of the programs.

A national talent foundation, similar to the National Science Foundation, should be established to enable students of promise to continue studying at the college level. These are the young people who attain only average achievement because of deficiencies resulting from cultural and economic handicaps.

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FROM BONFIRE TO PRAIRIE FIRE

By Richard L. Plaut, *President, NSSFNS and CTS*

The little bonfire that was lit five years ago at Junior High School 43 in New York City is now a prairie fire burning brightly across the nation.

This is from where some of the paper and kindling and firewood for the bonfire came.

On January 18th and 19th, 1962, the New York State Department of Education sponsored a Workshop for personnel from the 16 Project ABLE cities. In addition to a number of panel sessions, featured speakers were Daniel Schreiber, Director, NEA School Dropout Project and Richard L. Plaut, President, NSSFNS and CTS. This article is an abbreviated version of Mr. Plaut's paper.

The fourteen years of the experience of the National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students (NSSFNS) have led to the hypothesis that the 12th grade was far too late to salvage any sizable number of students suffering from educational lag. Other evidence gathered, both from NSSFNS activities and from many other sources, led us to the further hypothesis that the educational lag was common to all low-socio-economic groups.

These are no longer hypotheses, at least among most educators. They are accepted realities. But even today, if the average American were asked: "Do we have equal educational opportunity in the United States"?, he would answer, "Why of course we do." He would be wrong.

It is true that our children go to public or private schools in their neighborhoods. The schools are all subject to standards set by their respective state departments of education. They are housed in the best buildings and taught by the best teachers that the people of their respective school districts are willing to pay for. Is this not then equality? It is equality of educational offerings. It is not equal educational opportunity. To create genuine equality of educational opportunity, educational offerings often have to be decidedly unequal. Why?

Because we know that children learn at home as well as at school. In middle class homes, there are usually books and periodicals, records, and more often than not, relatively good vocabularies. Children are more often than not taken to theatre, to museums, to concerts, to ball games. Children from poor homes, in which life is a struggle for survival, often miss all these advantages.

Opportunity, however, can be equalized. Children from depressed areas can be motivated to stay in school, to like school, can be prepared to climb higher on the socio-economic scale, can be imbued with higher behavioral and intellectual values, but only with extra effort, extra time, extra equipment, extra personnel—only if those, responsible for the education of the children of all the people, recognize the exigencies of education in culturally deprived neighborhoods.

And so, we must have dual goals in education. First we need better education for everyone. But we also need equal educational opportunity and to provide this we have to do some discriminating in favor of the kid born with two strikes on him—whether the strikes be cultural, economic, or ethnic – couldn't matter less.

The results of non-recognition of these realities are that young people from poor homes, including a large number from minority groups, are unable to develop their full educational potential. Too many of these young people drop out before high school graduation, too many go into non-college preparatory curricula, too many finish high school without good enough college credentials or incentive or both to go on to college. Most of these undereducated live and grow up in the rundown areas of our great cities; others, fewer as well as much harder to reach, are from rural areas.

The problem is serious for three reasons: first, it is defeating the American Dream of equal educational opportunity; secondly, it is blocking social mobility; thirdly, it is depriving the nation of a substantial segment of its highly trained manpower potential, at a time when we can't afford the loss.

Concurrently some of us in New York City, led by Dr. Kenneth Clark, had the strong notion that some things were radically wrong in the New York City public schools, notably, their racial composition—which, in some areas of the city, could easily have been mistaken for Mississippi—as well as the equality of opportunity offered in these same schools. In his short term as Board President, Col. Arthur Levitt commissioned the now famous PEA Study, which more than confirmed the notions of Kenneth Clark and Co. Col. Levitt's last act as Board President, before coming to Albany as State Comptroller, was to induce the Board to appoint a Commission on Integration to study and recommend action to deal with both racial composition and the quality of educational opportunity.

As a member of the Commission on Integration and Chairman of its Sub-Commission on Guidance and Educational Stimulation, we were able to include in our recommendations ways of implementing most of the theory already outlined. Perhaps the most important of these recommendations came from a recognition that many years and many millions of dollars would be required to carry out all of the recommendations. We felt that something must get underway immediately. Thus the bonfire, the Demonstration Guidance Project at Junior High School 43 and George Washington High School, was lit. Its purpose was the early identification and educational stimulation of students of all deprived groups, regardless of race. Because the College Entrance Examination Board and NSSFNS became co-sponsors, with the New York City Board of Education, of Project 43, the emphasis was on the college-bound student. The success of the Project is by now too well known to require detailing here. It will suffice to recall that college going trebled, high school graduation increased manifold, drop-out numbers were halved, and disciplinary problems were enormously reduced.

After about 2 years of demonstrable success at Junior High School 43, New York City's new Superintendent of Schools, Dr. John J. Theobald found the flames burning at Junior High School 43 so beautiful that within two years he had the HIGHER HORIZONS program going on in 65 other New York City schools, as a permanent continuing program with an ultimate city-wide goal. Here the emphasis is on raising the sights and achievement of all students; the start in the 3rd grade is much earlier, the cost per pupil, consequently, much less—in the opinion now of all of us on the program's Advisory Committee, too much less.

John Theobald also moved rapidly towards eliminating

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de facto segregation. New York City's "Open Enrollment" program places New York far in the lead among American cities in moving against one of the great evils of our time.

As one of the chief catalysts in this movement, NSSFNS felt an obligation to help in its spread. Accordingly, it established a new activity called COMMUNITY TALENT SEARCH, established to offer consultation and technical assistance about what was being learned in New York City, to other communities across the nation which wished these services.

We talked with many wise and far-sighted men and women. Among the very earliest and most eagerly receptive were the key men right here in the State Department: Commissioner Allen, Deputy Commissioner Nyquist, Bruce Shear, Theron Johnson, among many others.

Hence, New York is now far in the lead, among the states, with Project ABLE—as well as far in the lead in attacking the problem of *de facto* segregation, starting with Commissioner Allen's current census.

We talked with such other wise educators as Commissioner Boehm in Harrisburg, Superintendent Carl Hansen in the District of Columbia, Dr. Ruth Hayre in Philadelphia, Supt. Spear and Associate Superintendent Durkee in San Francisco, to name only a few, with the result that there are projects going on all across the nation.

The bonfire has turned into a prairie fire, made up of:

- New York City's 65-school HIGHER HORIZONS Program.
- New York State's 16-city Project ABLE.
- Three more states, California, Maine and Pennsylvania on the verge of state-wide action.
- Projects in 15 to 20 other cities.
- The National Education Association's "Drop-Out Project."
- National and Regional Conferences sponsored by some of America's most prestigious educational organizations.
- Network TV coverage on NBC and Network Radio coverage on CBS.
- A chapter in the New York State Department-sponsored "Schools of Tomorrow Today" by Arthur D. Morse.
- Articles in TIME, SATURDAY EVENING POST, READERS DIGEST, LIFE, FORTUNE, LOOK.

That, I submit, is a *fire.*

There is much in these events that is encouraging but there are no grounds for complacency. The surface is just being tickled. Perhaps 250,000 deprived children are now benefiting from special services designed to equalize educational opportunity. The difference between these 250,000 and the eight to ten million disadvantaged children in our schools today is how far we have yet to go.

Recently the book of a distinguished American, Dr. James B. Conant, "Slums and Suburbs" was published. Its publication gives us at least one thing to be grateful for, a much larger audience knows that there is "dynamite" in our slums.

Dr. Conant's book, however, has also done disservice, if not violence, to the cause. Disservice, to overemphasize massive symptomatic treatment through vocational training and placement programs for drop-outs, *after* the damage has already been done. The programs may result in placing a few young people in the ever-*decreasing* number of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. They can never salvage, however, the masses of lost talent. Dr. Conant practically ignores preventive programs like HIGHER HORIZONS and Project ABLE, designed to catch young people *before* they are lost, so that they can fill the ever-*increasing* number of higher level jobs. This is the disservice.

Now for the violence: There are many of us who believe that educational opportunity is only equal when it is offered to every one at the same place, at the same time, and under the same conditions. There are many of us who also believe that *de facto* segregation carries with it the same seeds of damage, to both segregator and segregated alike, as does *de jure* segregation. This philosophy moved New York City to its "Open Enrollment" plan. Dr. Conant says flatly we are "on the wrong track."

We say to Dr. Conant that segregated education whether *de facto, de jure,* or for whatever reason, can never be either educationally successful or morally decent. We further say that, in working with thousands of schools across the nation for almost 15 years, we have yet to see one segregated school in which achievement came even close to its own community-wide average. The Supreme Court buried *Plessy Vs. Ferguson* in 1954. Dr. Conant tried to resurrect them in 1961.

How do we finish the job? The final obstacle blocking potentially able young people from going on from special projects to college, is lack of money. This is the justification for federal, state and privately sponsored scholarship programs. The needs of the increasing number of able young people, who already are knocking at the doors of our colleges, just cannot be provided for from existing sources of financial aid at current and ever-increasing costs of education.

The ability to pay can no longer be a critical factor in determining who shall go on to college. We have reached the stage where it no longer is a critical factor for most candidates of superior developed ability. There is almost enough financial aid in one form or another for those of them, who really need it and know where to look for it. There should be equal provision for the promising student whose achievement at 12th grade has been only average, or a little better, provided that the deficiency is a result of cultural and economic handicaps.

The almost 8,000 young people helped, during the 12 years of NSSFNS activity to enroll in 4-year, accredited, degree-granting institutions, constitute abundant evidence of how much can be accomplished with a little encouragement, enough information and some financial aid, at the right time.

Among the really few existing sources for such "scholarships of promise" is the NSSFNS Supplementary Scholarship Fund and the colleges which, through NSSFNS college advisory services, are persuaded to make awards to candidates we refer to them. The colleges have to make the basic awards before we have anything to supplement.

There is now awareness of this variety of needs in both educational and governmental circles. There has been a start towards the mobilization of public opinion. There are limited funds available from the federal government (NDEA), from some state governments, and from foundations. The prospect for the big breakthrough to the ultimate solution that appeared to be so close a few months ago, however, has fallen

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flat with the death of the Administration's school and college aid bills in the House of Representatives. These bills, as originally introduced, would have provided a federal scholarship program under the aid to higher education bill, as well as a 10% earmarking of school aid funds for experiment with the special educational problems of schools in the run-down areas of big cities. We can hope, but not with any great optimism, that similar bills will meet with more success in the next session of the Congress.

In the absence of overall federal aid to education, however, the most promising step towards the ultimate solution still appears to lie in the proposal for a national talent foundation, established along the lines of the National Science Foundation.

The task of a national talent foundation can be expressed in the following terms:

1. To increase opportunities for integrated higher education for students from all deprived groups.
2. To award financial aid to promising students from deprived backgrounds, who have been admitted by colleges but cannot compete successfully in the normal national and college scholarship competition.
3. To help local communities and school systems understand the need for and to acquire the resources, techniques, attitudes, and funds necessary to identify early, to stimulate educationally, and to offer the extra services needed, to equalize educational opportunity for all of their young people.

All this has already been done on a limited demonstration basis, with a very limited budget. It has been demonstrated that it can be done, that doing it pays off to the individual and to the nation. It is now time it was done on a grand scale, more suitable to the numbers of young people involved and their importance to themselves and to the nation. or, in the words of Commissioner Allen, "to provide a solution which is as great as the problem."